

Basic wage won't pay rent

Report: Full-time workers earning minimum pay can't afford one-bedroom unit in most of U.S.

By Genaro C. Armas
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In only four of the nation's 3,066 counties can someone working full-time and earning federal minimum wage afford to pay rent and utilities on a one-bedroom apartment, an advocacy group on low-income housing reported Monday.

A two-bedroom rental is even more of a burden — the typical worker must earn at least \$15.37

per hour to pay rent and utilities, the National Low Income Housing Coalition said in its annual "Out of Reach" report. That's nearly three times the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour.

"You get pushed into a situation where some necessities don't get paid for" because more salary must be devoted to housing, said Sheila Crowley, the coalition's executive director. "For people on low-wage fixed incomes, that's a chronic way of life."

About 36 million homes in the United States are rented. Roughly 80 percent of renter homes are located in nearly 1,000 counties in which a family must work over 80 hours per week — or more than two full-time jobs — at minimum wage to afford the typical two-bed-

room apartment, the coalition said.

The coalition's "housing wage" assumes that a family spends no more than 30 percent of its gross income on rent and utilities, since anything more is considered unaffordable by the government.

A one-bedroom apartment was considered affordable for minimum-wage workers in Crawford, Lawrence and Wayne counties in Illinois, where the housing wage was under \$6.29 per hour. The state minimum wage for most employees is \$5.50 per hour, but will rise to \$6.50 per hour on Jan. 1.

Least affordable was the San Francisco metropolitan area; rent and utilities for a one-bedroom apartment in Marin, San Francisco or San Mateo counties required

a wage of least \$22.63 per hour, tops in the nation. Those counties also led in the wage needed to afford a two-bedroom rental, at \$29.60 per hour.

California topped all states in the hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment, at \$21.24, followed by Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland and New York.

States with more residents in rural areas were generally the most affordable.

West Virginia was the lowest at \$9.31 per hour for a two-bedroom rental, then North Dakota, Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama.

On the Net
www.nlihc.org/index.html
www.hud.gov

Not too affordable

Wage increases have not kept up with increases in rent and utilities, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Hourly wage needed to afford rent and utilities on a typical two-bedroom apartment*

RANK		WAGE
52	District of Columbia	\$22.83
51	California	\$21.24
50	Massachusetts	\$20.93
49	New Jersey	\$20.35
48	Maryland	\$18.25
47	New York	\$18.18

5	Mississippi	\$9.79
4	Arkansas	\$9.63
3	North Dakota	\$9.48
2	West Virginia	\$9.31
1	Puerto Rico	\$7.22

* Wage assumes that a family spends no more than 30 percent of its gross income on housing

SOURCE: National Low Income Housing Coalition

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